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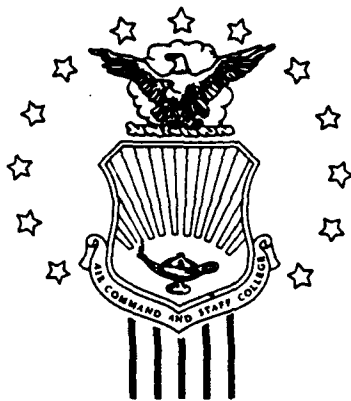
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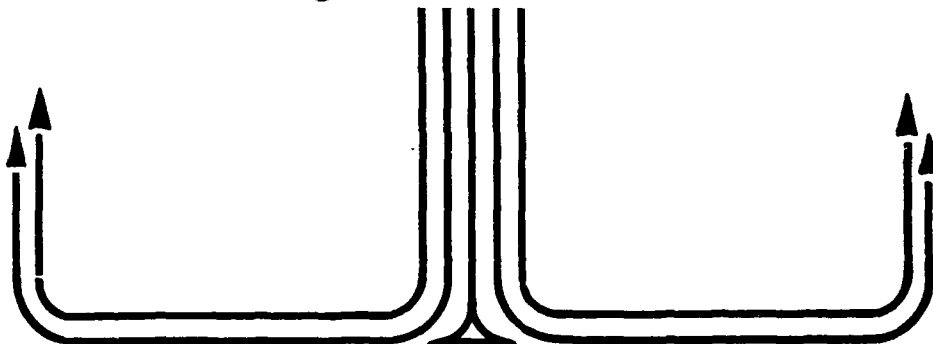
# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

MILITARY DISSENT AND JUNIOR OFFICERS

MAJOR Wm. TIMOTHY O'CONNELL 88-2015

"insights into tomorrow"



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**TITLE** MILITARY DISSENT AND JUNIOR OFFICERS

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of  
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<p>The Director of Curriculum at the Air Force Squadron Officer School requested an article for junior officers on disagreeing with the status quo, or simply dissent. This project looks at the appropriateness of teaching dissent in the military and the school's need for such an article. It concludes that teaching proper military dissent to junior officers is appropriate and the school needs the article. The article is at Appendix A of the project. It contains both an explanation of the value and limits of military dissent and techniques junior officers can use when disagreeing with the status quo.</p>					
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## PREFACE

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During his 17 years in the military, the author has seen numerous unsuccessful calls for innovation and creativity from junior officers. At the same time, he has watched talented lieutenants and captains stifle their creativity because of the dilemma they face. Their dilemma is how to disagree with the status quo, or how to dissent, without challenging the profession's fundamental principles of respect for rank and tradition, compliance with standards, and faithful obedience. Because of their inexperience and lack of training in solving this dilemma, many error in the direction of caution.

Most writings and lectures on this subject focus solely on the supervisor. They tell supervisors to be more open to ideas, receptive to innovation, and supportive of risk taking. Unfortunately, they fail to adapt their message when addressing junior officers. As a result, many junior officers do not recognize their responsibility as the subordinate to solve this dilemma, and they receive little guidance on how to properly dissent in a military environment.

The author, who previously taught and wrote on the subject of assertive followership at the United States Air Force Academy, approached the sponsor, Director of Curriculum at Squadron Officer School (SOS/EDC), with the proposal of writing an article on dissent by junior officers. During their discussion, the sponsor agreed that the school could benefit from work on such an article. The focus of the article would be on the function of dissent in the military and on methods a junior officer could use to properly present a difference of opinion. Subject to the sponsor's clearance, the Leadership Branch at SOS will consider the article at Appendix A of this project for publication in its course book.

The author acknowledges the assistance of others in preparing this project. Specifically, Major Traynor, Chief of the Leadership Branch at SOS, provided current course materials and evaluating the usefulness of both the first and final drafts of the article. Also, Major Randy Morris, a former SOS faculty member, provided constructive feedback on adapting the article for SOS students.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Major Wm. Timothy O'Connell was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduation from the United States Air Force Academy in 1975. He received his bachelor of science degree in life sciences and has since received his Masters of Science in Operations Management from the University of Arkansas. He was first assigned to B-52s in Strategic Air Command as a navigator and later as an instructor radar navigator. As a junior officer, he served as the president of a base junior officer council and attended Squadron Officer School in residence. In 1983 he was assigned to the United States Air Force Academy as Director, Third Class Professional Military Training (PMT). As director, he developed and taught leadership and assertive followership curriculum. In 1986 he moved on to Director, Curriculum and Evaluation of PMT and in 1987 moved up to Chief, Military Training Branch. While in these positions, he participated in the development and standardization of all Air Force precommissioning curriculum as a member of the Precommissioning Education Memorandum of Understanding (PEMU) Committee. While at the Air Force Academy, he also served as the associate commander of a cadet squadron and represented the institution on the Air Force Association's Junior Officer Advisory Council. He is presently a member of the Air Command and Staff College Class of 1988.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Preface.....	iii	
About the Author.....	iv	
Executive Summary.....	vi	
CHAPTER ONE--INTRODUCTION		
Purpose.....	1	
Scope.....	1	
Outline.....	1	
CHAPTER TWO--DISSENT IN THE MILITARY		
Introduction.....	2	
A History of Dissent.....	2	
Conclusion.....	6	
CHAPTER THREE--JUNIOR OFFICER DISSENT		
Introduction.....	7	
Cases of Dissent by Junior Officers.....	7	
Conclusion.....	10	
CHAPTER FOUR--EVALUATION OF SOS CURRICULUM		
Introduction.....	11	
SOS Labs.....	11	
SOS Readings.....	12	
Conclusion.....	13	
CHAPTER FIVE--RECOMMENDATION.....		14
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		15
APPENDIX A--Article.....		19



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**REPORT NUMBER** 88-2015

**AUTHOR(S)** MAJOR Wm. TIMOTHY O'CONNELL, USAF

**TITLE** MILITARY DISSENT AND JUNIOR OFFICERS

I. Purpose: To provide the Director of Curriculum at the Air Force Squadron Officer School (SOS) with an article on dissent by junior officers. The dissent discussed is not the political dissent popular in the 1960s. Rather, it is the questioning of the status quo and the stating of a disagreement within the military.

II. Problem: The project must establish the appropriateness of and a need for the article. To do this, it must first determine the appropriateness of discussing dissent in the military and the suitability of teaching junior officers to dissent. Then, it must look at the SOS curriculum to see if an article is needed by the school.

III. Discussion: To determine the appropriateness of discussing and teaching dissent in the military, the project summarizes numerous cases of dissent in the military, statements by military and civilian leaders on the subject, and examples of the strengths and limitations of military dissent. It also determines if junior

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## CONTINUED

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officers should be taught about dissent. To determine the need for an article, the project looks at the current SOS curriculum. Here it decides if only an article is needed or if an entire curriculum development project is necessary. It also looks for any existing articles in the student readings which could render a future article unnecessary.

IV. Conclusion: The sponsor's requested article is both appropriate and necessary.

V. Recommendation: The article should be written as requested. It should dovetail with an existing article on superior-subordinate relations, and it should be specifically addressed to a junior officer audience. Furthermore, it should incorporate the numerous cases of military dissent as introduction and motivation.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to provide the sponsor, Dean of Curriculum at Squadron Officer School (SOS/EDC), with an article on military dissent. With his approval, the Leadership Branch will incorporate the article into the readings for junior officers. The article is Appendix A of this project.

#### SCOPE

The author uses a limited definition of dissent. The dissent discussed is not the political dissent popular during the Vietnam Era. Instead, this project uses the specific definition of expressing a "difference in opinion; to disagree" (6:384). This disagreement can arise from innovative ideas, a perceived need for reform, or a conflict in the legal and/or ethical interpretation of instructions. Furthermore, the author limited the study of dissent to the conflicts junior officers will commonly experience in the military.

#### OUTLINE

Before presenting the article, this project determines the appropriateness of discussing dissent in the military and the need for an article on the subject. After this introductory chapter, Chapter Two focuses on the appropriateness of dissent in the military profession. Chapter Three narrows the focus further by looking for the appropriateness of junior officers' dissent. These two chapters are very important since an article would be unnecessary if they conclude that either military dissent or dissent by junior officers is inappropriate. Chapter Four then looks at the SOS curriculum to decide if an article on dissent will meet the sponsor's needs and to see if an article already exists. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the findings and makes recommendations for writing the article.

## Chapter Two

### DISSENT IN THE MILITARY

#### INTRODUCTION

Dissent in the military seems contrary to the profession's basic principles of discipline and obedience, yet it occasionally occurs. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to decide if dissent has an appropriate place in the military. To make this decision the chapter reviews cases of dissent in modern military history. This review provides two important functions. First, it helps determine the importance of dissent in supporting the mission of the military. Second, it provides insight to the limitations placed on dissent in the military. From these historical cases, this chapter draws a conclusion on the appropriateness of discussing military dissent in an article.

#### A HISTORY OF DISSENT

Napoleon was one of the first to articulate his views on dissent in a modern military. Having been a subordinate corporal and the high commander of a field army, he was intimately familiar with Clausewitz's fog and friction of war. As a result, he said the field commander is duty bound to challenge the instructions of a higher authority if he is aware of information that makes the orders incorrect for the objective (22:21).

Leaders in free societies have supported Napoleon's thoughts. During the Battle of the Jutland in World War One, Admiral Jellicoe's British naval forces won but failed to capitalize on the enemy's situation. In retrospect, Lord Fisher commented that "the admiral had all the qualities of a great fleet admiral except one, he had not learned how to disobey" (17:39).

Between the world wars, General Billy Mitchell demonstrated the acceptance and limits of dissent in the US military. His challenge of Army and Navy doctrine initially received mixed

acceptance. However, the military permitted him to not only state his ideas but also test them. It could even be argued that the acceptance of General Mitchell's dissent directly contributed to the development of an independent Air Force. But he tested the critical limit when he publicly attacked his civilian leadership. In a free society, founded on the principle of civilian control of the military, civilian leadership will not tolerate such conduct.

General MacArthur provided another vivid example of dissent and the limits of its toleration in the American military. Strongly out voted by the JCS and some members of Congress, General MacArthur was able to successfully disagree with the status quo of the fighting in Korea. This dissent resulted in the approval for one of the most daring and successful amphibious assaults in history at Inchon. However, he too exceeded the limits of military dissent when he attempted to usurp President Truman's authority over him. He defended his actions by pointing out that the oath of office swears allegiance not to "those who temporarily exercise the authority of the Executive Branch of the Government rather than to the country and its constitution which they are sworn to defend" (22:20). However, the executive branch prevailed over the personal power and charisma of the general by citing the constitution as the president's source of authority over military dissent.

Examples of dissent in the military during the twentieth century are not limited to the free world. In the Soviet Union where military writers degrade Western discipline as "based on class compulsion and blind obedience to officers" (7:36), there have also been examples of public dissent by the military. In one such case a two-star admiral publicly challenged a four-star admiral's assessment of the value of the aircraft carrier. The results were quite different from our normal expectation of Soviet military discipline; the four-star retracted his opinion and the two-star was promoted (20:40).

Back in the US the worry may not be of losing controls to military mavericks, but rather a shortage of risk-taking dissent. The Vietnam War saw the rise of micromanagement in deciding not only strategy but the very targets to be struck. The subsequent rise in attention to careerism and a managerial approach toward war prompted General T.R. Milton to look back on the possible benefits dissent may have had on the Vietnam War. After observing the impact General Singlaub had on President Carter's Korean policy he asked if "the retirement of a very senior officer could have provided the nation with some credible rebuttal to the noisy and articulate opponents of any bombing of North Vietnam" (22:20).

The conduct of the military thinkers during and after Vietnam inspired many authors to question this trend toward conservative careerism in the military. In one Air University Review article, "Where Have the Mitchells Gone?", the author asks where we will get our future Mitchells and Eakers to question the status quo and prepare us for the future. His concern is that doctrinal innovation is stagnating into conservative, careerist thinking (15:31). And, Douglas Kinnard's concluding remarks in The War Managers underscore a lesson learned from the "Can do ethos" of the Vietnam War. "It is tougher to oppose a policy than to say 'Yes, sir' and pretend to make it work, but surely the American officer corps has the integrity to stand up and be counted. Fortunately, the present military leadership recognizes the problem" (3:164).

Recognition of the problem surfaced recently during the Iran-Contra Hearings. At the beginning, many congressional leaders feared a loose cannon in the military ranks. Lt Col North's testimony on his unquestioning obedience of orders relieved these fears. However, they should have become equally concerned about the other extreme. Instead, the strongest criticism came within Lt Col North's profession. In his feature commentary in the Air Force Times, an Army colonel scolded him for placing blind obedience above constitutional principles and moral obligations (23:27).

This need to question the status quo has gained attention in all the services. Admiral Burke related a story from his years as Chief of Naval Operations when he had a plaque made for the first person who "knowingly disobeyed an order but did the right thing" (10:16). He reported it took three months to award the plaque. It was only recently that the Army deleted the sixth position in an artillery unit when someone questioned the regulation. After some research, they found the position was left over from the days when an extra man held the horses when the cannon was fired (18:15). Lt Gen Krulak presents a Marine's view on the subject in his Schulze Memorial Essay titled "A Soldier's Dilemma."

Young officers must strive to keep alive their creative and innovative energies ... it is a matter of duty and obligation. The essence of loyalty is the courage to propose the unpopular, coupled with a determination to obey, no matter how distasteful the ultimate decision. And the essence of leadership is the ability to inspire such behavior. (16:24)

Meanwhile, some Air Force schools teach how to challenge the status quo. For example, the Air Command and Staff College

(ACSC) curriculum requires field grade officers to advocate changes to accepted "truths" like AFM 1-1, Air Force Basic Doctrine (25:--). Additionally, writers in various service publications explain the necessary balance between compliance and dissent by expanding on Du Picq's words, "If one does not wish bonds broken, one should make them elastic and thereby strengthen them" (21:53; 4:135; 14:52).

Recently, the defense reform debate has challenged the status quo in the entire DOD. One active member of the debate, retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones, points out DOD came into being because of civilian acceptance of a military challenge to the existing structure.

Colonel Bendetsen [proposed] doing away with the War Department, transfer all of its elements to the Navy, and redesignate that organization as the Department of Defense. Instead of throwing the officer out of his office, General Marshall ... marched him straight to Secretary Stimson. Stimson called President Truman and asked for a meeting on this subject (1:276).

In another article on the reform debate, Senator Hart's legislative assistant for armed services, William S. Lind, points out the military reformers' role. He feels they are responsible for many of the ideas civilians receive credit for. More importantly, they have the "service and combat experience civilian reformers often lack" and they make the reform "something we can do instead of something we just talk about" (1:330).

The need for dissent in the future reaches beyond outdated regulations and ineffective policies; it will exist whenever moral or ethical dilemmas arise. In performance of their duties, military members are continually faced with ethical decisions. In professional ethics classes, ACSC students share stories each year on being instructed by superiors to take actions they felt legally bound to challenge (24:--; 13:7). Meanwhile, each fall cadets in the honor and ethics classes at the Air Force Academy reflect on the ethical challenges they faced during their summer tours in the operational Air Force (28:--). Furthermore, combat officers must be ready to properly deal with a clash between directives and the laws of armed conflict. As the Nuremberg Trials demonstrated, the American military and civilian leadership will not accept blind obedience as a defense for violating national and international law nor for unethical conduct.

## CONCLUSION

History contains many examples of the role of dissent in the military profession. Military and civilian leaders, regardless of their social ideology, have supported the need to question the status quo in the military. Furthermore, in the American society they expect the military to challenge illegal or unethical instructions. They also point out the crucial role military dissent plays in keeping the armed forces effective.

History has also illustrated the constraints levied on military dissent, especially in the United States. Specifically, the dissenter must not violate the basic intentions of military discipline, nor may an American dissenter challenge the principle of civilian control of the military regardless of the merit of the argument.

Though the profession may be much more conservative than the civilian culture, it is not an environment of extremes. Rather, it is a fine balance of teamwork versus individual innovation, servitude versus initiative, concentration on goals versus reflection on history, and rigid discipline versus flexible execution. Dissent serves a proper function in this balance, especially when dilemmas in dedication, loyalty, ethics, and judgment arise. Thus, like any other parts of the profession, it must be taught and applied in balance with other factors.



## Chapter Three

### JUNIOR OFFICER DISSENT

#### INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter looked at the appropriateness of dissent in the military. This chapter narrows the focus by concentrating on dissent by junior officers. Its purpose is to determine if dissent by junior officers is appropriate and should be taught. Specifically, its discussion deals with statements on the role of the junior officer in military dissent and looks at examples of junior officer dissent. The chapter closes with a recommendation on teaching junior officers about military dissent.

#### CASES OF DISSENT BY JUNIOR OFFICERS

The acceptance of junior officer dissent in the American military since the turn of the century is well documented. In his study of the American performance in World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam, General S. L. A. Marshall concluded that an after-action meeting must be conducted after each exercise. This review must have all members of the unit present, rank must be put aside, and differences of opinion must be settled by the weight of the evidence rather than the persons position. By increasing the flow of information, he felt that such meetings kept the soldiers informed of their mission, showed them where they fit in the big picture, and enabled them to develop better judgment under high pressure situations (14:49).

A forum for dissent also improves the subordinates' morale. It does this by letting them help build the units' effectiveness and by showing them that the senior officers care what they think. Some feel open discussion also has a therapeutic effect on combat stress. They point to the World War Two bomber crews' open debriefings as a factor in a very low rate of post-traumatic stress disorders (8:4).

Today some of the best units in the Air Force still encourage junior officers to participate in these open and free

discussions. The PACAF and TAC Commanders steered the author of Excellence in Tactical Fighter Squadrons toward their best units during his research. There he found a common attitude that

We, as a squadron, are only as good as our weakest link, so everyone works to make the squadron better. It's this kind of attitude that allows a second lieutenant to critique his flight commander, a major, during a debrief. In the excellent squadrons, this lieutenant's critique is welcome (2:17).

Precautions against stifling the courage to present innovation and controversial ideas exist at the highest levels. Major General Mall, Director of Personnel Plans, warns that we may be developing a "one mistake career mentality among our junior officers and NCOs [which] robs our people of the opportunity to test themselves, make mistakes, and learn valuable trial-and-error lessons" (19:2).

Permitting junior officers to exercise this latitude in initiative and judgment during peacetime might be a key to success in combat. As Lt Col Harry R. Borowski stated in his article, "Leadership to Match Our Technology,"

If history is any indicator, the opening battles of the next conflict will not match expected scenarios and may well be won or lost by the judgment of a few key men - judgment made when established plans and procedures offer no answer. At the point where technology fails and unexpected events develop, our commanders will be stripped to their basic leadership skills - skills they began to develop as cadets and junior officers, skills they need to exercise and broaden continuously as they become commanders (9:33).

Currently, some assert that the Air Force's strict discipline in following checklists and tech orders in a high tech environment gives the impression that discipline means blind obedience. However, this is not a valid conclusion. Despite the increase in technology, the Air Force refuses to turn its mission over to robots. The Air Force bases this action on a need for a human who can make the necessary deviations from the rules when circumstances change. Lt Col Gallardo recently clarified the relationship between discipline and such deviations when he wrote,

What is needed (a trait for which Americans are famous) are trained, motivated people who can apply their experience in an orderly, prescribed manner and yet be able to deviate or apply a separate set of

rules when the situation dictates. This professional, innovative spirit, is also a form of discipline (12:18).

This professional judgment is not limited to the cockpit. While on the Air Staff, a captain received specific guidance on writing the arms control implication of MX development. A conflict arose, however, when he realized the guidance was not consistent with the terms of the SALT agreements. When he voiced his concern over following the guidance his supervisor instructed him to write down his position. The captain's position paper was elevated to the Chief of Staff and accepted contrary to the original guidance (29:--). In his case, the Air Force senior leadership permitted a member, regardless of rank, to present a professional challenge to instructions.

The senior leadership of American precommissioning sources have also supported the development of this questioning process by future junior officer. General Scott, the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, told his cadets and staff, "Any fool can keep the rule. God gave him a brain to know when to break the rule" (17:39). As early as 1963, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Curtis LeMay, wrote a letter to the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy criticizing the school for impressing on cadets that punishment produces the best effort from people. As a solution, he instructed the Superintendent to foster creativity and "to turn out well-educated officers who are disciplined but not rigid or unresponsive to new or developing trends" (26:2). His rationale for this was, "Every day I see more evidence of the necessity for Air Force officers to be independent thinkers; to be innovators rather than drivers or followers" (26:1).

These examples underscore the importance of developing sound, assertive judgment in our peacetime junior officers so they succeed in combat. Once war comes the leadership of America stands behind this principle. During the My Lai Trial, Lt Calley defended his actions as following orders as he understood them. But, the court reaffirmed the importance of the lessons from the Nuremberg Trials for American junior officers (17:39).

A look at the Officer Effectiveness Report is a lesson on the Air Force's expectations for junior officer dissent. Block Two of Section III of the AF Form 707 is titled Judgment and Decisions. To meet or exceed standards, the officer must be a "keen, analytical thinker" who does "not hesitate to make required decisions" and whose "opinion and judgment are often solicited by others." To be rated high in Block Seven, Oral Communications, the officer must be able to "sway a hostile audience to his or her point of view" (5:205). Thus, the Air Force establishes via its

evaluation system an expectation that junior officers make analytical decisions and effectively advocate any resulting unpopular view.

### CONCLUSION

From this study, three conclusions are made. First, the military has encouraged dissent by junior officers when it improves effectiveness. Second, junior officers can enhance mission effectiveness when they properly challenge the status quo. And finally, junior officers are legally bound to present a challenge to instructions which violate the law. Based on these conclusions, this chapter recommends that SOS teach junior officers the significance of dissent and some techniques for properly dissenting in the military.

## Chapter Four

### EVALUATION OF SOS CURRICULUM

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to determine if the Air Force Squadron Officer School (SOS) needs an article on dissent. The sponsor of this project, SOS/EDC, has asked for an article on the topic. Before an article is written, this chapter must determine two things.

First, it must determine if only an article is necessary. Since SOS is an application oriented program, an article alone will not be sufficient if there are no supporting labs. Thus, the project looks at the existing labs to see if they reinforce the concept of dissent in the military. If there are no supporting labs, an entire curriculum development project might be necessary.

Second, this project must determine if SOS currently has a student reading which adequately covers the topic of proper military dissent. If such a reading exists, another is unnecessary. On the other hand, if a reading does not exist, the article should be written.

#### SOS LABS

SOS conducts a number of labs in the fourth phase of the leadership application area of training. In addition to athletic contests, SOS conducts labs in the classroom, during field exercises, and at Project X. Each of these contains a problem solving exercise where students must work as a team. The school encourages students to take risks and to assert themselves during these labs. In many cases the lab designers created the need for dissent by providing each individual with bits of knowledge not available to the nominal leader yet demanding high quality decisions. For example, the goal of

Project X is for the student to "apply and value ... dynamic followership to solve physical and mental exercises that facilitate group problem solving, organization, and communication" (B2:78). After each lab, the faculty encourages students to participate in group debriefings where they may present dissenting views. Later, the section commander provides the individual student feedback on his or her development and delivery of a new or unpopular idea.

After observing and participating in a number of these labs, the author concludes they reinforce the principles of proper military dissent. Also, the school provides each student with feedback on his or her use of dissent techniques in the military. The next step is to determine if an article on dissent in the military exists in the SOS curriculum.

### SOS READINGS

According to the Chief of the Leadership Branch at SOS, his branch publishes all the articles for the leadership block of instruction. Of these articles, only three directly relate to the subject of dissent (aa:--). The author evaluated each article to find how well it discusses the subject of dissent in the military.

The first article, "What to Observe in a Group" by Dr Edgar Schein, provides only a limited, peripheral view of the subject. Dr Schein discusses harmonizing and gate keeping in one part of the article. By his definition, harmonizing is "attempting to reconcile disagreements; reduce tension; getting people to explore differences ..." (B2:15). He defines gate keeping as "helping to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others; suggesting procedures that permit sharing remarks ..." (B2:15). Though these are valuable topics, Dr Schein's discussion of them is too brief and not specifically adapted to the junior officer. Rather, he directs his comments primarily to a leader who must effectively deal with a subordinate's dissent. Furthermore, he gives no specific advice on how to initiate and present dissent as a subordinate.

In the second article, "It Will Never be Easy, But It Can Be Better," Mr Larry Porter outlines the criteria for effective feedback. During this discussion, he gives some relevant advice on dissent. He points out the increased difficulty of giving feedback when the sender and receiver are not equals. But he seems to deter any attempt to provide information up the chain with such comments as "it is likely to turn into a number of games" (B2:42). Also, his aim is to help the reader break out of the habit of giving feedback up the chain "the way it was

done to us" (B2:42). Since most Air Force junior officers have had very little experience receiving dissent from subordinates, they will probably not relate to Mr Porter's message.

Mr William J Crockett's article, "Dynamic Subordinancy," is the best reading in this section for explaining dissent. Mr Crockett devotes one section to the boss-subordinate relationship. Here he discusses dissent under the title of challenging. He is right on target when he says, "We must obey the legal demands of our bosses, but in doing so we do not have to ... take on the hangdog pose of the servant. We can become the trusted adviser from whom the boss comes to get the straight dope" (B2:6). He goes on to say that good bosses "don't like subservience and don't trust 'yes' people. Most bosses want subordinates who will challenge their ideas, differ with their decisions, give them data, put forward new ideas for doing things ... " (B2:7). After setting the stage, he lists a number of techniques for challenging. (B2:7-9)

Mr Crockett's article has some shortcomings, however. His intended readership is the general public. Thus, his article falls short of the targeted junior officer audience in two ways. First, he does not motivate the junior officer to learn about the topic by discussing the role of dissent in the military. Second, he does not offer specific techniques a junior officer can use to effectively dissent in the military.

### CONCLUSION

A review of the SOS curriculum resulted in some specific conclusions. SOS labs reinforce properly presented dissent by junior officers. The labs do this by their design and through follow-up critiques. Thus, SOS does not need an entire curriculum development project. Meanwhile, only one of the supporting readings clearly addresses the topic of dissent. However, it does not completely cover the topic nor is it specifically addressed to a military audience. Consequently, this project agrees that the sponsor needs an article on the background of military dissent and the proper techniques for presenting it.

## Chapter Five

### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions and recommendations of the previous chapters, this project recommends the author write the article requested by the sponsor. To make the article useful to the sponsor, this project establishes the following criteria. These are based both on the author's experience writing and editing articles for professional military education and on the findings of this project, particularly Chapter Four.

1. The author must address the article to junior officers to ensure it communicates to the sponsor's audience at SOS.

2. The introduction of the article must dovetail with the SOS article "Dynamic Subordinancy" to provide continuity for the reader.

3. The article should use examples from Chapters Two and Three to illustrate the function of dissent in the military.

4. The article should contain specific techniques which a junior officer can use and which the SOS labs can reinforced.

5. Major Bernard Traynor, Chief of the Leadership Branch at Squadron Officer School and the sponsor's designated point of contact, must review the article to ensure it will be useful to the school.

6. The author will not place the article at Appendix A until it meets Major Traynor's standards of usefulness.



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## APPENDIX

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A..... ARTICLE ON MILITARY DISSENT AND JUNIOR OFFICERS

MILITARY DISSENT AND JUNIOR OFFICERS

An Article  
Submitted to the  
Director of Curriculum  
of  
Squadron Officer School  
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

by Major Wm. Timothy O'Connell  
ASCS Class of 1988

## INTRODUCTION

In your previous reading, "Dynamic Subordinancy," Mr Crockett points out that "most bosses want subordinates who will challenge their ideas, differ with their decisions, give them data, put forward new ideas for doing things . . . " (19:7). After serving as a junior officer, teaching officer candidates, and supervising a number of junior officers, I have found the military bosses make very few exceptions to Mr Crockett's conclusion. However, the military, because of the premium it places on discipline and obedience, is a unique place to challenge the status quo or, more simply put, to dissent. Nevertheless, creative thinking, innovation, and questioning the status quo are key activities in any organization.

This article overviews dissent from this military perspective. It examines the historical examples of dissent in the profession of arms to demonstrate its strengths and limitations. It also looks at the junior officers role in the art of military dissent. Then, to better prepare you for developing this art, it outlines some successful techniques junior officers have used to advocate their ideas. Finally, the article underscores your obligation to place selfless duty to country above all other motivations when dissenting.

## DISSENT IN THE PROFESSION

Napoleon was one of the first to articulate his views on dissent in a modern military. Having been a subordinate corporal and the high commander of a field army, he was intimately familiar with Clausewitz's fog and friction of war. As a result, he said the field commander is duty bound to challenge the instructions of a higher authority if he is aware of information that makes the orders incorrect for the objective (18:21).

Leaders in free societies have supported Napoleon's thoughts. During the Battle of the Jutland in World War One, Admiral Jellicoe's British naval forces won but failed to capitalize on the enemy's situation. In retrospect, Lord Fisher commented that "the admiral had all the qualities of a great fleet admiral except one, he had not learned how to disobey" (15:9).

Between the world wars, General Billy Mitchell demonstrated the acceptance and limits of dissent in the US military. His challenge of Army and Navy doctrine initially received mixed acceptance. However, the military permitted him to not only state his ideas but also test them. It could even be argued that the acceptance of Mitchell's dissent directly contributed to the development of an independent Air Force. But he tested the critical limit of military dissent when he publicly attacked his civilian leadership. In a free society founded on the principle of civilian control of the military, civilian leadership will not tolerate such conduct.

General MacArthur provided another vivid example of dissent and the limits of its toleration in the American military. Strongly out voted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and some members of Congress, General MacArthur was able to successfully disagree with the status quo of fighting in Korea. This dissent resulted in the approval of the most daring and successful amphibious assaults in history at Inchon. However, he too exceeded the limits of military dissent when he attempted to usurp President Truman's authority over him. He defended his actions by pointing out that the oath of office swears allegiance not to "those who temporarily exercise the authority of the Executive Branch of the Government rather than to the country and its constitution which they are sworn to defend" (18:20). However, the executive branch prevailed over the personal power and charisma of the general by citing the constitution as the president's source of authority over military dissent.

However, the conduct of the military thinkers during and after Vietnam has inspired many authors to question the trend toward conservative careerism in the military. In one Air University Review article, "Where have the Mitchells Gone?," the author asks where we will get our future Mitchells and Eakers to question the status quo and prepare us for the future. His concern is that doctrinal innovation is stagnating in conservative, careerist thinking (13:31). And, Douglas Kinnard's concluding remarks in The War Managers underscore a lesson learned from the "can do ethos" of the Vietnam War. "It is tougher to oppose a policy than to say 'Yes, sir' and pretend to make it work, but surely the American officer corps has the integrity to stand up and be counted. Fortunately, the present military leadership recognizes the problem" (8:164).

The need to question the status quo has gained attention in all the services. Admiral Burke relates a story from his years as Chief of Naval Operations when he had a plaque made for the first person who "knowingly disobeyed an order but did

the right thing." He reported it took him three months to award the plaque (10:16). It was only recently that the Army deleted the sixth position in an artillery unit when someone questioned the regulation. After some research, they found the position was left over from the days when an extra soldier held the horses when the team fired the cannon (16:15). Lt Gen Krulak presents a Marine's view on the subject in his article Schulze Memorial Essay entitled "A Soldier's Dilemma."

Young officers must strive to keep alive their creative and innovative energies ... it is a matter of duty and obligation. The essence of loyalty is the courage to propose the unpopular, coupled with a determination to obey, no matter how distasteful the ultimate decision. And the essence of leadership is the ability to inspire such behavior. (14:24)

Recently, the defense reform debate has challenged the status quo in the entire DOD. One active member of the debate, retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones, points out DOD came into being because of civilian acceptance of a military challenge to the existing structure.

Colonel Bendetsen [proposed] doing away with the War Department, transfer all of its elements to the Navy, and redesignate that organization as the Department of Defense. Instead of throwing the officer out of his office, General Marshall ... marched him straight to Secretary Stimson. Stimson called President Truman and asked for a meeting on this subject (3:276).

In another article on the reform debate, Senator Hart's legislative assistant for armed services, William S. Lind, pointed out the military reformers' role. He feels they are responsible for many of the ideas civilians receive credit for. Most importantly, they have the "service and combat experience civilian reformers often lack" and they make the reform "something we can do instead of something we just talk about" (3:330).

The need for dissent in the future reaches beyond outdated regulations and ineffective policies; the need will exist wherever moral or ethical dilemmas arise. In performance of their duties, military members are continually faced with ethical decisions. Furthermore, combat officers must be ready to deal with the clash between directives and the laws of armed conflict. As the Nuremberg Trials demonstrated, the American military and civilian leadership will not accept



blind obedience as a defense for violating national and international law nor for acting unethically.

### DISSENT BY JUNIOR OFFICERS

The acceptance of junior officer dissent in the American military since the turn of the century is well documented. In his study of the American performance in World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam, General S. L. A. Marshall concluded that an after-action meeting must be conducted after each exercise. This review must have all members of the unit present, rank must be put aside, and differences of opinion must be settled by the weight of the evidence rather than the persons position. By increasing the flow of information, he felt that such meetings kept the soldiers informed of their mission, showed them where they fit in the big picture, and enabled them to develop better judgment under high pressure situations (12:49).

Today some of the best units in the Air Force still encourage junior officers to participate in these open and free discussions. The PACAF and TAC commanders steered the author of Excellence in Tactical Fighter Squadrons toward their best units during his research. There he found a common attitude that

We, as a squadron, are only as good as our weakest link, so everyone works to make the squadron better. It's this kind of attitude that allows a second lieutenant to critique his flight commander, a major, during a debrief. In the excellent squadrons, this lieutenant's critique is welcome (4:17).

Precautions against stifling the courage to present innovation and contrary judgment exist at the highest levels in the Air Force. Major General Mall, Director of Personnel Plans, warns that we may be developing a "one mistake career mentality among our junior officers and NCOs [which] robs our people of the opportunity to test themselves, make mistakes, and learn valuable trial-and-error lessons" (17:2).

Currently, some assert that the Air Force's strict discipline in following checklists and tech orders in a high tech environment gives the impression discipline means blind obedience. However, this is not a valid conclusion. Despite the increase in technology, the Air Force continues to resist turning its mission over to robots. This resistance is based on the need for a human who can make the necessary deviations

when circumstances change. Lt Col Gallardo recently clarified the relationship between discipline and such deviations when he wrote

What is needed (a trait for which Americans are famous) are trained, motivated people who can apply their experience in an orderly, prescribed manner and yet be able to deviate or apply a separate set of rules when the situation dictates. This professional, innovative spirit, is also a form of discipline (11:18).

This professional judgment is not limited to the cockpit. During a tour of duty as an Air Staff action officer, a captain received specific guidance on writing the arms control implication of MX development. A conflict arose, however, when he realized that the guidance was not consistent with the terms of the SALT agreements. When he voiced his concern over following the guidance his supervisor instructed him to write down his position. The captain's position paper was elevated to the Chief of Staff and accepted contrary to the original guidance (22:--). In his case, the Air Force senior leadership permitted a member, regardless of rank, to present a professional challenge to instructions.

These examples underscore the importance of developing sound, assertive judgment in our peacetime junior officers so they succeed in combat. Once war begins the leadership of America stands behind this principle. During the My Lai Trial, Lt Calley defended his actions as following orders as he understood them. But, the court reaffirmed the lessons from the Nuremberg Trials for American junior officers (15:39).

A look at the Officer Effectiveness Report is also a lesson on the Air Force's expectations for junior officer dissent. Block Two of Section III of the AF Form 707 is titled Judgment and Decisions. To meet or exceed standards, the officer must be a "keen, analytical thinker" who does "not hesitate to make required decisions" and whose "opinion and judgment is solicited by others." To be rated high in Block Seven, Oral Communications, the officer must be able to "sway a hostile audience to his or her point of view" (9:205). Thus, the Air Force establishes an expectation via its evaluation system that junior officers make analytical decisions and effectively advocate any resulting unpopular view.

From these examples three conclusions are made. First, the military has encouraged dissent by junior officers when it

improves effectiveness. Second, junior officers can enhance mission effectiveness when they appropriately challenge the status quo. And finally, junior officers are legally bound to present a challenge to instructions which violate the law. Thus, a junior officer must consider the development of professional and effective dissenting skills an important part of his or her development as a professional officer.

## TECHNIQUES

As you have seen, professional and well presented dissent by junior officers is encouraged and, in some situations, legally required. But, the terms professional and well presented can be intangibles in your work environment. They must be broken down into supporting techniques. These techniques fall into two broad categories: establishing preconditions and delivery.

### ESTABLISHING PRECONDITIONS

#### 1. Trust

Probably the most important precondition you must establish is your boss's trust in you. Without trust, your comments might easily be categorized as an unqualified complaint or careerist maneuvering. As Mr Crockett said in your previous reading, "there can be no real professionalism without trust" (19:9). Trust does not just happen, however. As a subordinate, you must create and nurture it. There are a number of ways of do this.

a. Expertise. Master the job. Treat it with a sense of urgency. Become an expert and a point of reference on all aspects of the job. Then, become very familiar with others' jobs, especially those that affect your job, the boss, and the unit.

b. Image. Look and act the part of a trusted agent. Dress to project this role. Demonstrate that you realize you represent more than yourself by subjugating your personal preference to the unit standards. The person who follows only the "letter of the law" or who stretches the length of a break is sending a message to the unit, "I want to belong but not enough to sacrifice." The person who stays well within the intent of the rules is saying, "I am in 100 percent. You can count on me." If you were the boss, whose dissent would you

trust as being in the best interest of the unit?

Also, ensure your mannerisms project a professional image. Act like the mature, responsible person that comes up with productive, innovative ideas. Use clear word choice and purposeful nonverbal communication. Remember, part of selling your idea is to sell yourself (2:96).

c. Association. The boss's perception of your associations impacts his or her receptiveness to your ideas. Your ideas typically started from the comments of your associates or at least you get feedback from them on your idea. If your associates support the unit and have made helpful contributions to the unit's mission, your boss will probably be more receptive. On the other hand, if you associate with people with hidden agenda and self-interests or who lack a professional drive, the boss might suspect your dissent.

d. Goals. Your goals communicate a lot about you. If your goals are short-term or self-centered, the boss's trust in your inputs will carry far less weight than if they are long-term and team oriented. Establish and communicate your goals early. You can communicate your goals via the AF Form 90 or by simply giving your boss a written outline of them.

e. Loyalty. Keep the boss informed. Don't complain to others about his or her shortcomings or about problems in the unit. And never put him or her into an embarrassing situation (19:9). If you don't have the guts to deal with the problems, don't go around the boss. If you catch your boss's errors, back him or her up like you would any other team member and never imply you scored points with your discovery (17:175).

f. Dealing with Your Feedback. Your behavior sets an example for those up as well as down the chain of command. If you cannot deal with challenges directed toward your ideas in a mature manner, those above you are less likely to listen and act on your challenge.

## 2. Determine Importance

There are many issues which compel a junior officer to present a dissenting view, but it is the wise officer who can set priorities on these issues. In setting priorities, determine the relevance of the issue to the 'big picture'. Fighting an issue when it is very minor to the unit mission wastes time and patience. If you're not sure of the importance of an issue, check around or even ask your boss.

In determining priorities you need to also estimate how much of your energy it will take to present your case effectively. It is a mark of courage to throw yourself on the sword for a noble cause, but wasting time on every issue is an abuse of an Air Force resource--your time and your superior's.

### 3. Differentiate between Wrong and Different

Just because your idea is right does not mean another is wrong. To borrow from Dr Andre's idea, you may find that NORWAY applies (1:91). That is, there is No One Right WAY. The existing way may also be right, in which case your dissent would be insubordination resistance rather than courageous devotion. If confronted with this situation, follow the lead and set your idea aside for the future should circumstances change.

### 4. Know the Dissent Channel

There are a number of established and widely used channels for dissent in the Air Force. Become familiar with them so you can use the one most appropriate for your situation. Some programs to look at are the Suggestion Program's AF Form 1000, the MIP Program, hazard and safety report, various base councils, and after-action reports. Also, look at AFP 13-2, Tongue and Quill, for Air Force written and oral formats for advocating.

### 5. Timing

The saying "don't change horses in midstream" is vital to the discussion of military dissent. Before the plan is executed, dissent might be acceptable. But, once the execution phase begins, changing the plan can cause more problems than it will solve. Therefore, it is your duty at the lieutenant and captain level to salute sharply and support the plan, unless, of course, it is unethical or illegal. Likewise, it is your responsibility to be proactive and make your inputs during the decision phase.

### 6. Know the Law

Naturally, you cannot determine if your instructions are illegal if you don't know the law. Unfortunately, you will not have the luxury of time to look up the law when you receive the typical illegal order. Now is the time to study

the UCMJ, laws of armed conflict, Code of Conduct, regulations, and the nations and international laws which impact your performance as an officer.

## DELIVERY

When delivery of dissent is discussed such words as tact and professional come to mind. The problem once again is that these are very general concepts. The following provides more specific techniques:

### 1. Control Your Emotions

Don't try to plead your case or demand action. Remain calm despite adversity, use emotional terms judiciously, anticipate rebuttals, and if possible, pick a comfortable time and place to present your position. You want your dissent to receive mature, unemotional consideration. If you present your challenge on an adult level (rather than the demanding parent or pleading child levels), your ideas have a better chance of receiving this desired consideration (6:35; 21:30-31).

### 2. Recognize Idiosyncrasies

Even the most professional environment has personal idiosyncrasies and organizational sacred cows. This isn't to say you must stifle your dissent because of them, especially if they are the subject of your dissent. However, you must be sensitive to things like pride of authorship, unwritten rules, and personality conflicts. Concentrate your energy on one issue at a time by not drawing unnecessary opposition into the dialogue.

### 3. Use the Chain of Command

Work your dissent within the chain--always. As a junior officer you do not have the credentials to go outside the chain. Furthermore, in the military the chain of command is the most effective means of solving a problem, even when it is the problem. Work with your immediate boss first. If that does not solve the problem, discuss any intention you have of going higher.

One other point before we move on. There is an increase in the number of senior officers who like to get out and talk

to their people. Despite the convenience of these visits, continue to observe the chain of command in routing your dissent. You may use such an opportunity to speed up the process, but first coordinate your comments with your immediate superior.

#### 4. Written Dissent

A written statement is often the best way to present your disagreement with the status quo. Written dissent has many advantages. Typically, a reader is less defensive than a listener. Also, the reader can pick the time and place to read your dissent. This puts him or her at ease by preventing an unnecessary confrontation. Written dissent is also private. The reader can read it free of pressure to immediately react and is free to reconsider an initial negative reaction before rendering a final judgment. Furthermore, when you write your dissent you will usually present your most complete and organized thoughts.

The Air Force has a number of written instruments for presenting your dissent. AFP 13-2, Tongue and Quill, presents such instruments as the formal letter, talking paper, position paper, and bullet background paper. You will find both explanations and examples of each in that pamphlet (20:115-117, 139-145, 151-153).

#### 5. Support

Support your challenge. Find facts, quotes, models, or historical examples to support your ideas. Ensure they are accurate, concrete, and credible. Then, present them in support of a logical conclusion. Your ultimate goal is for the audience adopting your idea as theirs (14:26). Support will help you lead them there.

#### 6. Provide a Solution

Whenever you challenge the status quo, present a solution (14:27). The world is full of problems and messengers, the problem solver is the rarity. In a few cases, you might find your superiors fault the status quo but support it because there is nothing better. Thus, your solution can be more important than your explanation of the problem. They need your innovative problem solving as well as your communication skills (2:168-175).

## 7. Be Prepared for Rejection

If your challenge is rejected, you have two choices: continue your battle another way or quit. You can continue the battle by taking your dissent through other channels, changing your approach or audience, or developing a better solution. Quitting can be done by either following or getting out of the way. Before the assault on Inchon, Rear Admiral Doyle presented alternative ideas to Gen MacArthur. When the general was unmoved, the admiral gave his total commitment to the attack (14:27-28). Both the dissent and the obedience were professionalism in action. Likewise, had Lt Calley challenged the order he thought he received and had his challenge failed, it would have been his duty to disobey the illegal orders and step aside when ordered to do so.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

On the surface, the concept of dissent in the military seems contrary to the profession's fundamental principles of discipline and obedience. But history has shown that dissent, when properly timed and presented, can complement discipline in accomplishing the mission. Furthermore, there are examples within the Air Force of support for innovative junior officers who challenge the status quo.

Like any other part of military leadership or followership, dissent is an art. The techniques you learn are only the skills. To properly develop the art, you must practice the skills which best fit your personality and the situation with daring. This requires both courage and bravery. It takes the moral courage to risk a comfortable niche in the unit by advocating an unpopular idea. As one American officer wrote, "The bars, leaves, birds and stars that mark an officer are not just to be worn, at times they must also be bet" (15:39). Due to the courage of many before you, the Air Force has stayed in the forefront of warfighting ability. Additionally, it takes the physical bravery to comply with what Sir John Hackett called our profession's "unlimited liability clause" (5:23) or to risk your life following the very order you unsuccessfully challenged. Ultimately, your dissent will complement your professional discipline only when your underlying motivation is a selfless desire to do what is right for your country and not what is right for your ego or career.



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